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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 000581

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MASS](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [AE](#)  
SUBJECT: S/I SATTERFIELD BRIEF TO BAHRAIN ON IRAQI  
DEVELOPMENTS

Classified by Charge d'Affaires Martin Quinn, reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

#### Summary

¶1. (S) Special Advisor David Satterfield and four accompanying experts on Iraq and Iran briefed a Bahraini delegation in Abu Dhabi on May 7. Satterfield emphasized that the time is ripe for a substantive Arab diplomatic presence in Baghdad; Secretary General of the Bahraini National Defense Council Sheikh Ahmad bin Khalifa agreed with the assessment and reiterated that his government was, in principle, committed to sending an Ambassador. His delegation conveyed lingering suspicions about Shi'a loyalty to Iran; the U.S. delegation noted that Senior Shi'a players must adapt to political reality as it evolves and argued strongly for GCC states to help shape that political reality. As Sunni groups also adjust to increased engagement with the GoI, and even integration, the USG sees increased GoI willingness to deal proactively with them. The delegations also discussed PM al-Maliki's evolution as a leader, and other Iraqi leaders, in the context of encouraging engagement from a strategic perspective rather than based on personal characteristics or ambitions. End summary.

#### Time for an Arab Presence

¶2. (S) Ambassador Satterfield recalled fluctuations in Baghdad's security and political environments since 2006, when the bombing of the al-Askari mosque underscored how tenuous had been the achievements in Iraqi reconciliation up to that point. Subsequent developments indicate a positive trend in GoI ability and determination to pursue national interests without regard to political identity, and to pursue security without leaving "safe areas" in which militia or insurgent groups can operate. Recent events in Basra underscore that positive trend and evidence PM Maliki's increasing confidence as a national leader. Maliki's embrace of the "Sons of Iraq," despite initial reservations about outreach to Sunni groups (some of whom had admittedly been involved in violence), is characteristic of an improving national leadership paradigm. The GoI is, in fact, "taking ownership" of the process of integrating the Sons of Iraq into the security services and civilian employment. On the Shi'a side, Maliki is responding vigorously to threats by Jaysh al-Mahdi and "special groups" under the influence of Iran -- a nation which has clearly overplayed its hand in Iraq and is undermining its own support.

¶3. (S) Citing the need to force Iran to deal directly with an emboldened GoI rather than through influence on surrogate groups in Iraq, Satterfield stressed that GCC support would have a very positive impact. Checking Iran's ambitions in Iraq would constitute a check on its regional goals. We have

a moment of opportunity in which strong Arab engagement with the GoI could help turn the tide. However, the lack of Arab embassies in Baghdad leaves the field of influence to those who are there -- the Iranians (whose mission is second only in size to the U.S. presence). Bahrain should not depend on second hand information, but should have its own eyes and ears on the ground in Baghdad, said Satterfield, noting how he had visited the Bahraini Charge in the hospital in Baghdad after the latter was injured some years ago. Returning such an "extraordinary diplomat" to Baghdad would give Bahrain a significant voice in issues that impact its future -- Bahrain should be in Baghdad for Bahrain's own sake.

¶4. (S) Sheikh Ahmad said Bahrain had announced its intention to return an Ambassador to Baghdad and requested assistance in locating a mission within the International Zone. He welcomed Satterfield's assurance that the USG was working to ensure a secure facility, saying this was the first such notice he was aware of from the USG and he would relay the good news to Manama. Satterfield promised to provide additional details on a proposed Bahraini facility (from our Embassy in Baghdad) within a week; the USG will assist others with particular concerns as well, he noted.

#### Lingering Bahraini Concerns over Shi'a Loyalties to Iran

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¶5. (S) Bahrain, for its part, monitors security threats from Iran on a daily basis and endeavors to share data with USG authorities. Sheikh Ahmad added that Bahrain has information that ISCI leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim and others are in fact "related" to Iran. Satterfield reiterated that Iran's

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ambitions must be checked and that Iraq's national leadership must be reinforced as it seeks to govern free of Iran's intervention. The Shi'a of Iraq look to Najaf and Karbala, not Iran, for guidance from their "marja'iyya" and should not be viewed by neighboring states as "Persian" in their identity. Iran is less comfortable with its position in Iraq than it was two months ago, asserted Satterfield, and was in fact set back by the evolution of events in Basra. Others in the USG delegation underscored the same theme with analysis of Iranian missteps, increased GoI confidence, and an internal debate in Iran about how to protect its interests in Iraq. Iraq needs other strong neighbors (besides Iran) present in Baghdad to take advantage of opportunities for influence.

¶6. (S) Ambassador Faihani still questioned whether al-Hakim's loyalties had indeed switched from Khamenei to Sistani; Satterfield stressed that al-Hakim has political ambitions for his family and indeed -- like many other Iraqi figures from all communities -- has ties to Iran. But al-Hakim must adjust to reality on the ground. The US hoped that such adjustments would move increasingly away from Iran toward a more "national" approach.

#### Encouraging GoI Engagement with Sunni Groups

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¶7. (S) Sunni groups are engaging with the GoI on an ongoing basis, including progressive integration of the Sons of Iraq into GoI institutions and programs. The USG sees increased GoI willingness to deal proactively with groups that still cause it some concern. An opportunity now exists for pushing these groups toward integration and away from keeping one foot in the resistance (a group of former senior military officers negotiating a resumption of pension payments with the GoI is an example of the improving potential for cooperation). While there is still some perception, in the sea of mistrust that is Iraq, that "Sunni equals Baathist" and "Shi'a equals loyalty to Iran," those stereotypes are breaking down as diverse groups cooperate in the national policy arena and Iran continues to overplay its hand in Iraq, said Satterfield. GCC help would sway that equation in the

right direction, he noted, and complement negotiation of an enduring and effective U.S. presence through a SOFA and Special Framework agreement with Iraq.

#### Looking for Leadership

¶8. (S) The Bahraini delegation raised Saudi concerns about Maliki's credibility. Saudi King Abdullah is influenced by what he hears from Iraqi (largely Sunni) tribal leaders, who have often complained about Maliki. Sheikh Ahmad agreed with Satterfield that a strategic perspective and not a personal approach (i.e., simply rejecting Maliki because "he lied" in the past), is the safe course. Maliki is growing from his roots as a "Dawa insider" into a national leader, stressed Satterfield, and his neighbors must play to his national leadership potential rather than shy away from his personal quirks or emotions.

¶9. (S) In a brief discussion about other potential Iraqi leaders, the delegations agreed that Iyad Allawi should be encouraged to play a role inside Iraq if he seeks a positive impact on Baghdad politics. His absence from the country is not helpful. An improved personal chemistry between Maliki and Tareq al-Hashemi is evident and hopeful in facilitating more unified governance, said Satterfield. Broad Sunni participation in provincial elections later this year will be another positive indication of practical reconciliation. Moqtada al-Sadr is also faced with a choice of cooperation or confrontation, and Satterfield hoped the Sadr Movement would "reconcile with and join the political process." Even his own senior lieutenants are confused by Sadr, noted Satterfield, and other religious leaders simply see him as unstable. As for possible succession in the event of Sistani's death, the Bahraini delegation felt Bashir al-Najafi was likely the best of the four likely candidates (the others including Haq al-Fayyad and Mohammed Saeed al-Hakim).

#### ¶10. (SBU) Participants:

----- U.S. delegation  
-- David Satterfield, Special Advisor for Iraq  
-- Jonathan McCarter  
-- Christopher Manfra  
-- Jillian Burns, Iran Regional Presence Office Director  
-- Don Blome, Strategic Engagement Cell

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----- Bahraini delegation  
-- Sheikh Ahmad bin Khalifa al-Khalifa, Secretary General, National Defense Council  
-- Ambassador Saeed al-Faihani, Office of the Foreign Minister  
-- Colonel Issa al-Bin Ali, Bahrain National Security Agency  
-- Abdulrahman al-Eid, Director of Sheikh Ahmad's office  
-- Adnan al-Dhaen, National Security Agency.

¶11. (U) Ambassador Satterfield approved this message.

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